



CONNECTICUT  
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900 Chapel St., 9th Floor, New Haven, Connecticut 06510-2807  
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THE VOICE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

TESTIMONY  
of the  
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES  
to the  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 23, 2009

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local governments - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 93% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony to you on issues of concern to towns and cities.

**Raised Senate Bill 942 "An Act Establishing a Date Certain for Student Notification of Attendance at an Interdistrict Magnet School"** would require that a student notify the school district in which they reside of their choice to attend an interdistrict magnet school by May 1<sup>st</sup> of such decision.

According to the bill's statement of purpose, the intention of this proposal is to provide the sending district notice so that budgetary adjustments can be made to accommodate the additional costs that will be associated. However, by May 1 many, if not most, municipal budgets are already complete. This process begins in most towns in late fall and are finalized by early to mid-spring. May 1<sup>st</sup> would be far too late for a sending district to include such costs into their budget.

CCM urges the committee to amend this bill and include an earlier notification date.

## ## ##

If you have any questions, please contact Kachina Walsh-Weaver, Senior Legislative Associate of  
via email [kweaver@ccm-ct.org](mailto:kweaver@ccm-ct.org) or via phone (203) 498-3026.



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CCM opposes Raised Senate Bill 946 "*An Act Concerning Interdistrict Magnet Schools*" as a new unfunded mandate on local governments.

This proposal would eliminate the parent-pay option for students attending certain interdistrict magnet schools and leave the municipality in which the student resides to foot the entire bill.

Public Act 07-3 has already stripped ECS dollars from sending districts and required them to pay the cost of tuition for any children attending magnet schools, regardless of whether or not the municipality is participating with those magnet schools. This bill would eliminate the parent-pay option that is used in certain circumstances.

Too many of the new changes the State makes to education laws -- magnet school payments, mandated curriculum, use of certain products, and others -- increase costs to local governments and add stress on local taxpayers and property taxes. In the meantime, the State's share of the statewide costs of education has decreased. Until meaningful reform can be undertaken to reduce the over-reliance on property taxes as the sole means to fund local governments and local public education, no new unfunded mandates should be placed on towns and cities.

CCM urges the committee to take no action on this bill.

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**CCM supports Raised House Bill 6488 "An Act Concerning Installation of Photovoltaic Panels on School Buildings"**

This bill would allow photovoltaic panels installed on school buildings to be eligible for school construction grant reimbursement.

Providing reimbursement for the installation of this energy-saving technology would lower the total cost of government over the long-term. It also helps to reduce America's energy dependence, and help combat global warming. Any measure that can do those things while helping to offset costs in this current economic climate is money well spent.

CCM urges the committee to favorably report this bill.

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**CCM opposes Raised House Bill 6492 "An Act Authorizing Board of Education Contingency Funds"**

This proposal would allow local boards of education to establish contingency funds, into which they could put unexpended funds not to exceed \$150,000, for future use.

The local legislative body is the entity that is responsible for the overall budget and revenue structure for the municipality. Allowing any one department the ability to have a "special" contingency fund for unexpended money, rather than having it go back into the general fund of the town, is not prudent public policy. The proper process is for such moneys to be returned to the general fund and distributed as determined by the proper budgetary process. The State should not interfere with local processes.

CCM urges the committee to take no action on this bill.

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**CCM opposes Raised House Bill 6494 "An Act Concerning Teen Dating Violence Education" as a new unfunded mandate on local governments.**

This proposal would mandate local school districts to implement new curriculum on teen dating violence and to provide in-service training to educators in this new curriculum. There is no quibble with the importance of the topic -- only that if this item is added, something else will have to go, or school time (and cost) increased.

Each new mandated curriculum passed down from the state to local school districts only serves to dilute further the minimal amount of time educators have to work with their students on the core curriculum -- math, science, English, and social studies. If the State were to mandate any new curriculum it should also provide educators with guidance as to what parts of the current curriculum should be reduced in order to supplement it with the new.

CCM urges the committee to take no action on this bill.

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**CCM opposes Raised House Bill 6496 "An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products" as a new unfunded mandate on local governments.**

Certainly the intention of this proposal, to utilize only "green" cleaning products in schools, is laudable. But this bill would be an unfunded mandate to local and regional school districts by requiring:

- The *implementation of a "green cleaning program"* in all school districts for the cleaning and maintenance of all school buildings and facilities by October 1, 2011.
- The *use of only cleaning products that have met the "green" standards* of a certified independent third party.
- *Training and refresher courses* for all facility managers, custodians and indoor air quality committees.
- Local boards of education to *provide notice* of the green building program to all parents *via mail and posting on each individual schools website*.

As any shopper knows, the cost of "green" products often is more expensive than traditional products. When purchasing such products for a residence or business, the individual who chooses to purchase the "green" brands does so of their own accord and has made a conscious decision to spend the extra money. While the costs of such products have come down over the last several years as demand has increased, the reality is that they still tend to be more expensive.

Instead of creating yet another unfunded state mandate on local school districts, on top of the plethora that are already in place, CCM urges the committee to (1) establish a voluntary program that would allow municipalities to procure "green" products through the Department of Administrative Services; (2) establish a list of vendors who provide these products and distribute it to local purchasing agents; and, (3) create an educational program to share with local school districts on the benefits and proper use of these products.

However, in the end the decision should be left to the discretion of the local purchasing agents to determine the best product for their circumstances – unless amended as suggested, we urge you to take no action on this bill.

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CCM opposes, as written Section 2 of Raised House Bill 6497 "An Act Concerning Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care", and asks that it be amended.

Section 2 of this proposal would make the municipality solely responsible for any special education costs incurred by a student who originated from such municipality but is now placed in foster care.

Special education is the single largest cost accelerant of education spending in Connecticut. It is estimated that special education costs grow 5%-6% per year, 1%-2% faster than most other education costs. How, and at what level, the State reimburses municipalities for these mandated costs is one of the biggest issues in discussions about financing for local public education.

With special education expenditures now topping the \$1.5 billion mark, the local share at around 56% will soon reach \$1 billion. Special education spending accounts for 14% of all education spending in Connecticut and costs keep growing faster than other school spending (5%-6% vs. 3%-4%). Complicating matters, unforeseen demands for the most expensive special education services too often result in local mid-year budget shuffling, supplementary appropriations, and other extraordinary measures. This is particularly true in smaller towns, where the arrival of a single new high-cost special education student during the school year can create a budget crisis.

The responsibility for most special education costs tends to be straightforward, if unfair: if a child lives in a given town, that town must pay (and only get reimbursed for certain extraordinary costs). But students placed in foster care have been placed there by the State. They may never have another connection to their 'original' home town, so burdening that community makes little sense (just as it would make little sense to burden the 'original' town if a student's family moves to another because there is a perception that the special education program is better there). Similarly, there is no reason the town in which the student has been placed should shoulder the cost burden -- all that town or city is doing is hosting a child that needs help, and it shouldn't be financially 'punished' for doing so. In these situations only one policy seems fair: the State should take on the responsibility for all the costs.

CCM urges the committee to amend this bill to provide that the State pay 100% of the costs of special education for children placed in foster care.

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